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Perceptions of hotel top managers for opportunities and strategic collaboration with a foreign partner in tourism sector: An applied research in Alanya destination

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Abstract

This study aims to measure the perceptions of hotel top managers about the opportunities in tourism sector and their desire to make a partnership with a foreign investor. The study also focuses on measuring the perceptions of top managers about attractive sectors to invest in Turkey, the supports needed in tourism sector, key institutions which can support tourism firms, obstacles for tourism opportunities, preferences for foreign partners, supports expected from foreign partners. And top managers of three-stars, four-stars, and five stars hotels operating in Alanya were included in the research. At the end of the survey completed in December 2011, a total of 95 completed questionnaires were returned (50.3 percent response rate) from 189 top managers of these hotels. Research results indicate that managers think that tourism is an opportunity sector to invest in Turkey and they have a desire to invest in tourism sector with a foreign partner. Furthermore, Anova-Test results do show that no statistical relationship between the evaluations of managers with research items and their demographic variables is found.

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1. Introduction

The rise of global competition and economic pressures has encouraged more companies to enter into alliances on a worldwide basis (Othman, 1998). In other words, under the rapidly changing competitive conditions, enterprises opt to cooperate with their counterparts, even with their competitors to protect and develop their market shares and technologies. Strategic alliances, as a form of this cooperation, have now turned into a requisite for most sectors. As a result, a significant increase in the number of strategic alliances has been observed in recent years as a “strategic alternative” (Özalp, Besler and Doğrul, 2010).

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The argument is that strategic alliances can be used effectively in order to achieve growth and competitiveness which, in tourism industry, take a variety of forms and occur across vertical, horizontal and diagonal relationships (Poon, 1993; Bullock, 1998; Go and Appelman, 2001; Dale, 2003; Pansiri, 2005a). This is so because tourism is a 'highly complex compounded service brought about through the "assembly" of different services that are being delivered by a network of companies that is often global in scope' (Dale, 2003; Pansiri, 2005b). And major players in the tourism industry, particularly airlines, hotels, travel agents and tour operators have increasingly integrated in an industry whose boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred (Poon, 1993). In this context, our study focuses on the desire of hotel top managers to make a strategic collaboration with a foreign partner to get the opportunities in tourism industry. Firstly, the study examines the literature with strategic alliance and tourism. And then, the survey results conducted on hotel top managers to understand willingness, expectations, causes and barriers for making a collaboration with a foreign partner to get the opportunities in tourism industry are presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategic Alliances

Strategic alliances has been variously defined as (1) a long-term cooperative agreement between two or more independent companies that engages in business activities for mutual economic gains (Tsang, 1998), (2) a collaboration leveraging the strengths of two or more organizations to achieve strategic goals (Aaker, 1998), (3) voluntary arrangements between firms involving exchange, sharing or co development of products, technologies, or services as a result of a motives and goals, in various forms and occur across vertical and horizontal boundaries (Othman, 1998), purposive arrangements between two or more independent organisations that form part of, and are consistent with participants' overall strategies, and contribute to the achievement of their strategically significant objectives that are mutually beneficial (Pansiri, 2005a; Huang, 2006; Pansiri, 2005b).

Faced with rapid technological advances, changing market structures, and increasing global competition, firms are motivated to form alliances with other firms in order to reduce investment risks, share technology, improve efficiency, gain access to specific foreign markets and distribution channels, enhance global mobility, and strengthen global competitiveness (Huang, 2006; Auster, 1987; Harrigan, 1988; Lin and Chen, 2002). A number of key trends are stimulating the emergence of newer forms of business relationships: increasing globalization and the internalization of markets; a blurring of the distinction between product and services marketing; the emergence of telecommunications and computing, with the resultant increase in both information and communication; the quickening pace of change; the disintermediation of markets; the emergence of network competition; knowledge-based not product-based organizations; and the merging of marketing strategy with corporate strategy (Atalık and Halıcı, 2009).

A strategic alliance can take many forms such as licencing, franchising, equity ownership and marketing, R&D agreements, joint ventures, joint product development, long-term resource utilization, turn-key agreements, subcontracting agreements, distribution or logistics-based alliances (Özalp, Besler and Doğrul, 2010; Pansiri, 2005a; Zabo, 2009; Konoke, 2005; Pansiri, 2005b). And Alliances offer a number of direct benefits to their members including; gaining quick access to new markets, technology, overcome trade barriers, avoid predatory competition, gaining knowledge, and customers; absorbing a key local competitor; and lowering risk by sharing costs and benefiting from a partner's political connections (Preble, Reichel, and Hoffman, 2000; Varadarajan and Cunningham, 1995; Inkpen and Beamish, 1997; Lin and Chen, 2002; Doz and Hamel, 1998; Carayannis, Kassiech and Radosevich, 2000). Explicitly, alliances must provide the partners with superior resources and/or skills that they would not otherwise possess on their own. And these key resources obtained through alliances may include location, brand name, and customer base (Preble, Reichel and Hoffman, 2000; Varadarajan and Cunningham, 1995).

There were many successful strategic alliances in the world. Briefly, there were 37,538 strategic alliances in the USA, 9,417 strategic alliances in Japan and just 212 strategic alliances in Turkey between 1990 and 1999 among 30 OECD countries (Tekinay, 2004; Barutçu, Tanyeri and Gönen, 2009). In addition to IBM's major player with its strategic alliances more than 400 in the world by 1995, some of the well-known successful examples in different industries were between GM and Toyota, Inland Steel and Nippon Steel, Canon and Kodak, Siemens and Philips, Digital Equipment Corporation and Apple Computer etc (Barutçu, Tanyeri and Gönen, 2009; Hanan, 1996).

Meanwhile, it is known that many problems may occur in strategic alliances. Thus, dealing with the differences in organizations (1), building in some flexibility and capacity for change (2), if possible- living together before marriage (3), having a balanced management team to avoid having one partner to dominate the organization (4), and gaining together (5) may be efficient tools to enhance the chances of a successful alliance (Aaker, 1998).

2.2. Strategic Alliances and Tourism

Tourism is known as one of the most highly integrated industries in the World (Bullock, 1998). Because, companies are facing highly sophisticated and demanding consumers, and there is a growing need to have close linkages and partnerships between the travel industry, namely, hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, airlines, transportation, banking, telecommunications and national tourism organisations. For example, travel agencies form alliances so as to gain economies of scale and experience, to improve distribution channel management capability, and to integrate destination marketing with new information technologies, such as virtual tourism and the Internet (Yaman and Shaw, 2001). In other words, the benefits from a strategic network for the travel-related industry may include reduced competition, generating barriers to entry, gaining new market opportunities, increasing the speed of market entry, a more efficient distribution and transactional process, technological synergies, shared risk, and resource sharing (Dale, 2003; Huang, 2006). Furthermore, based on the tourism and strategic alliance literature review, eight alliance types were identified for tourism industry and these are joint venture, equity participating alliance, brand sharing, franchises and licensing, marketing and distribution agreements, joint selling or distribution, sharing information and communication technology, and joint purchasing and equipment/office sharing (Pansiri, 2008; Huang, 2006). For example, the largest franchise groups in Australia include Harvey World Travel, Traveland, and Jet Tours Ltd. (Howard and Harris, 2001). And numerous regional hotel chains aligned themselves with international partners (e.g., Choice Hotels, Holiday Inn, Marriott, and Sheraton) using global brands for regional expansion or as a transition strategy to increase company performance (Preble, Reichel and Hoffman, 2000).

3. Methodology

In this study, data were collected through a questionnaire designed by the authors. Demographic survey part of the questionnaire is composed of 8 variables. And 12 variables exist on the second part of the questionnaire to measure the perceptions of top managers about the opportunities in tourism sector and their desire to make a partnership with a foreign investor. The instrument consisted of these 12 items answered on a five-point Likert with anchors strongly agree (= 1) and strongly disagree (=5). And 9 open-ended questions exist on the third part of the questionnaire to measure the perceptions of top managers about attractive sectors to invest in Turkey, the supports needed in tourism sector, key institutions which can support tourism firms, obstacles for tourism opportunities, preferences for foreign partners, supports expected from foreign partners. SPSS pc + version 16.0 was used for statistical analysis in the study. Differences in the responses between the groups were tested by the Anova-Test Analysis.

4. Findings

Alanya is a resort in Antalya, and it's situated in the 135 km east coast of Antalya Gulf on the Anatolian Peninsula which is sharing the Mediterranean Sea coastline. The Mediterranean region is one of the most important tourist destinations in the world, constituting one-third of all international tourist movements (Montanari, 1995). Although, Alanya met with tourism in the late 1950s (Aktaş, Çevirgen and Toker, 2009), it has become one of the most important tourism destinations of Turkey with its 6-7 % share in total, approximately 158.000 beds in 678 hotels in 2010 and annual tourism receipts exceeding \$1 billion (Doğan, Barutçu and Üngüren, 2010). Moreover, there is a steady increase in tourist number of Alanya, Antalya and Turkey, except 2006 and 2009 due to the global crisis. Alanya's share is 6-7% in national tourism, and 20-21% in Antalya tourism. On the other hand, Germans, Russians, the Dutch, Ukrainians and the British are the largest five groups visited Antalya and Alanya. Contrary to Germans, there is a steady increase in the number of Russians and the British visiting Antalya and Alanya for last five years. But, there is a dramatic decrease in the number of Israeli, 1,64% in 2009 and 1,53% in 2010 due to the political problems between two countries.

4.1. Findings For Hotels and Demographics

On the other hand, 65 three-stars hotels, 79 four-stars hotels and 45 five-stars hotels are located in Alanya [35]. As seen from Table 1, a total of 95 completed questionnaires were returned (50,3 percent response rate) from 189 top managers of these hotels. The findings seen from Table 1 indicate that 67,4 percent of these hotels are family investment, 27,3 percent are national partnership and 5,3 percent are foreign partnership.

Table 1: Firm (Hotel) findings

Firm type	Frequency	Percent	Hotel Stars	Frequency	Percent
Family investment	64	67,4%	Three stars	33	34,7%
National partnership	26	27,3%	Four stars	39	41,1%
Foreign partnership	5	5,3%	Five stars	23	24,2%
Total	95	100%	Total	95	100%

Demographic statistics of the respondents were presented in Table 2. As can be seen from this table, the majority of our respondents were male employees (76,8%); and 23,2% were female. And 72,6 percent of the respondents were married, 27,4 percent were single. Managers were categorized by age: 21-30 years (7,4%), 31-40 years (45,3%), 41-50 years (33,7%), and 51 years and over (13,7%).

Vocational experience was also assessed using categorical brackets. 4,2 percent of the respondents indicated they were between the experience of one to five; 18,9 percent indicated they were six to ten; 23,2 percent were eleven to fifteen; 18,9 percent were sixteen to twenty and 33,7 percent (majority) of the respondents were twenty-one and over. Managers were also categorized by managerial experience: 1-5 years (15,8%), 6-10 years (33,7%), 11-15 years (22,1%), 16-20 years (26,3%) and 21 years and over (0,0%).

Table 2: Demographics findings

Age	Frequency	Percent	Education	Frequency	Percent
21-30	7	7,4%	Elementary	1	1,1%
31-40	43	45,3%	High school	24	25,3%
41-50	32	33,7%	University	67	70,5%
51 and over	13	13,7%	Master	2	2,1%
Vocational experience	Frequency	Percent	Managerial experience	Frequency	Percent
1-5 years	4	4,2%	1-5 years	15	15,8%
6-10 years	18	18,9%	6-10 years	32	33,7%
11-15 years	22	23,2%	11-15 years	21	22,1%
16-20 years	18	18,9%	16-20 years	25	26,3%
21 years and over	32	33,7%	21 years and over	-	-
Foreign language	Frequency	Percent	Gender	Frequency	Percent
No foreign language	3	3,2%	Female	22	23,2%
One language	34	34,9%	Male	73	76,8%

Two languages	45	47,4%	Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Three languages	9	9,5%	Married	69	72,6%
Four languages	2	2,1%	Single	26	27,4%

Also as presented in Table 2, the majority (70.5%) of the respondents held university degrees, 25,3 percent high school degrees, 1,1 percent elementary school degrees, and 2,1 percent master degrees. Additionally, managers were categorized by foreign language; no foreign language (3,2%), one foreign language (34,9.%), two foreign languages (47,4%), three foreign languages (9,5%), and four foreign languages (2,1%). Consequently, demographic results indicate that vocational experience (52,6% in 16 years and over) and educational levels of managers (72,6 percent university or master degree) were high, but managerial experience (55,8% in 6-15 years) and age average (79% in 31-50 years) were low.

4.2. The Results of Factor Analysis

12 items of the questionnaire were included in a factor analysis. At the end of the factor analysis, items of the questionnaire were collected in two factor groups which were labelled as: tourism-opportunity sector and desire to invest in tourism sector with a foreign partner.

The results (presented in Table 3) of the factor analysis show that our factor groups were rather reliable and consistent. Because 2 items of the questionnaire were deleted as their factor loadings were lower than 0,500. Alpha coefficients of two factor groups, namely tourism-opportunity sector and desire to invest in tourism sector with a foreign partner were very high; 0,840 and 0,915. On the other hand, research results indicate that managers think that tourism is an opportunity sector to invest in Turkey (with a mean of 2,361) and they have a desire to invest in tourism sector with a foreign partner (with a mean of 2,307). Furthermore, Anova-Test results do show that no statistical relationship between the evaluations of managers with research items and their demographic variables is found.

Table 3: Factor loadings and reliability (cronbach alpha) values of research items

Variables and Factor Groups	F1	F2	Alpha	Mean	St. Dev.
Tourism is an opportunity sector.			0,840	2,361	0,836
	0,875			2,242	0,895
	0,779			2,021	0,989
	0,752			1,978	0,850
	0,636			1,910	0,813
	0,626			2,080	0,953
	0,576			1,760	0,740
Desire to invest in tourism sector with a foreign partner			0,915	2,307	0,930
		0,926		2,315	1,047
		0,921		2,311	1,021
		0,892		2,462	1,137
		0,754		2,197	0,957
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0,776				

4.3. Research Findings

According to the top managers participated in our research, the most attractive (opportunity) sectors in Turkey are sequentially tourism (82,1 percent), construction (35,8%), information technologies (20,0%), agriculture (18,9%), energy (11,6%), food (7,4%), health (5,3%) and textile (4,2%).

Table 4: The most attractive (opportunity) sectors and sector preferences of top managers to invest in Turkey

Opportunity sectors in Turkey	Frequency	Percent	Sectors to invest in Turkey	Frequency	Percent
Tourism	78	82,1%	Tourism	73	76,8%
Construction	34	35,8%	Construction	31	32,6%
Information technologies	19	20,0%	Agriculture	18	18,9%
Agriculture	18	18,9%	Information technologies	8	8,4%
Energy	11	11,6%	Textile	5	5,3%
Food	7	7,4%	Food	6	6,3%
Health	5	5,3%	Transportation	5	5,3%
Textile	4	4,2%	Finance-Banking	2	2,1%

And managers have a desire to invest in tourism (76,8 percent), construction (32,6%), agriculture (18,9%), information technologies (8,4%), textile (5,3%), food (6,3%), transportation (5,3%) and finance-banking (2,1%) sector. Interestingly, managers evaluate energy and health as attractive (opportunity) sectors, but they do not intend to invest. Furthermore, they put transportation (5.3%) and finance-banking (2,1%) sectors in investment list (Table 4).

The major finding seen from Table 4 is tourism and construction are two sectors put by managers in top of both attractive and investment sector list. The majority (82,1%) of the managers find tourism as the most attractive sector in Turkey, and 76,8% plan to invest in tourism sector. Construction is the second most attractive sector (35,8%) but only 32,6% of the managers plan to invest. As seen from Table 4, managers think that information technologies, agriculture and energy sectors having a potential in supplying opportunities for entrepreneurs in Turkey. But 18,9 percent of managers plan to invest in agriculture, followed by who want to invest in information technologies (8,4%). And no managers plan to invest in energy sector.

Table 5: The most attractive tourism types and support needs of top managers to catch the opportunities in tourism sector

The most attractive tourism types to Invest	Frequency	Percent	Supports to need to catch the opportunities in tourism sector	Frequency	Percent
Health tourism	39	41,1%	Financial (credit) support	51	53,7%
Sport tourism	35	36,8%	Tax relief	22	23,2%
Art-cultural tourism	25	26,3%	Experienced-well educated staff	17	17,9%
Golf tourism	18	18,9%	Marketing (advertisement)	12	12,6%
Accommodation (sea-sand-sun) tourism	14	14,7%	Estate	8	8,4%

Eco-tourism	11	11,6%	Infrastructure	7	7,4%
Yacht tourism	6	6,3%	Bureaucratic support	5	5,3%

According to the managers participated in the research (Table 5), the most attractive tourism types to invest in Turkey are sequentially health tourism (41.1%), sport tourism (36,8%), art-cultural tourism (26,3%), golf tourism (18,9%), accommodation-hospitality (sea-sand-sun) tourism (14,7%), eco-tourism (11,6%), and yacht tourism (6,3%). And the most critical supports needed by the managers to catch the opportunities in tourism sector are sequentially financial support (53,7%), tax relief (23,2%), experienced-well educated staff (17,9%), marketing (advertisement) support (12,6%), estate support (8.4%), infrastructure support (7,4%), and bureaucratic support (5,3%).

Table 6: The key institutions and barriers in tourism sector to catch the opportunities

Institutions needed supports to catch the opportunities in tourism sector	Frequency	Percent	Barriers to catch the opportunities in tourism sector	Frequency	Percent
Tourism ministry	72	75,8%	Bureaucracy	23	24,2%
Municipality	53	55,8%	High costs	18	18,9%
Vocational groups-organizations	10	10,5%	High rate of employee turnover	18	18,9%
Banks	8	8,4%	Transportation (Airways)	15	15,8%
Governorship	7	7,4%	Financial problems	12	12,6%
Tourism agents	3	3,2%	Infrastructure problems	7	7,4%

Research results seen from Table 6 indicate that key institutions which managers expect supports from to catch the opportunities in tourism sector are tourism ministry (75,8%), municipalities (55,8%), vocational groups-organizations (10,5%), banks (8,4%), governorship (7,4%), and tourism agents (3,2%). According to the managers, main problems to be solved to catch the opportunities in tourism sector are bureaucratic barriers (24,2%), high costs (18,9%), high rate of employee turnover (18,9%), transportation (airways) problems (15,8%), financial problems (12,6%), and infrastructure problems (7,4%).

Table 7: Expected supports and foreign partner preferences of top managers in tourism sector

Foreign partners preferred by top managers	Frequency	Percent	Expected supports from foreign partner	Frequency	Percent
Scandinavian	65	68,4%	Financial support	50	52,6%
German	38	40,0%	Marketing support	41	43,2%
Russian	33	34,7%	Managerial experience	16	16,9%
British	22	23,2%	Technology	6	6,3%
Dutch	18	18,9%	Competitive (brand) advantage	4	4,3%

As seen from Table 7, research results indicate that the nationalities of foreign partners mostly preferred by managers are Scandinavians (68,4%), Germans (40,0%), Russians (34,7%), the British (23,2%), and the Dutch (18,9%). And mostly expected supports from foreign partners are financial (52,6%), marketing (43,2%), managerial experience (16,9), technology (6,3%), and competitive (brand-usage) advantage.

5. Conclusion

Tourism is evaluated as the most attractive sector supplying new opportunities for entrepreneurs according to the major findings of the study. National tourism statistics also confirm this finding because there is a steady increase in tourist number and tourism receipts of Turkey and Alanya. Tourist number of Turkey increased more than 100% in the last 8 years. Similarly, tourist number of Alanya increased more than 80% as well as tourism receipts increased approximately 50% in the last 8 years. Research results indicate that entrepreneurs in tourism sector expect this increase to go on in the next years. So, they intend to invest in tourism sector. Furthermore, they are eager to make a partnership with foreign investors. Especially, they prefer to make a strategic collaboration with Scandinavian, German, Russian, English and Dutch partners. Tourist profile of Alanya can explain the reason of this preference. According to the tourist statistics of Alanya, Germans, Russians and Scandinavians are the largest three groups visited the city. Contrary to Germans, there is a steady increase in the number of Russian, Scandinavian and English tourists visiting Alanya for last five years. These are similar to the findings of Aktas and his friends' research (2009), as well as the findings of Doğan and his friends' research (2010) applied in Alanya (Aktaş, Çevirgen and Toker, 2009; Doğan, Barutçu and Üngüren, 2010). Also, tourism research and statistics indicate that receipt per tourist for Scandinavian, English and Dutch is very high.

On the other hand, research results indicate that entrepreneurs especially intend to invest in health, sport, art-cultural and golf tourism in the next years. Also, tourism statistics of Turkey and Antalya show that investments in these tourism sectors and tourist number have gone up in the last years. For example, the number of football teams come to Antalya to make a seasonal preparation camp for league exceeded 1500 in 2010 (Ertuğrul, 2010). And, the tourist number visited Turkey for golf-tourism is 125.000 in 2010 (Golf turizm raporu, 2010). Total receipt of golf tourism in Turkey is approximately \$400 million in 2010. Moreover, 18 of total 22 golf fields of Turkey are in Antalya. And Antalya-Belek was declared as "the best golf destination" by The Association of International Golf-Tour Operators in 2008. 2012-World Amateur Golf Championship is going to be organized in Antalya (Golf turizm raporu, 2010). Similarly, health-tourist number and tourism receipts of Turkey increased in the last years. In 2010, approximately 500.000 health tourists visited Turkey and total receipt was \$800 million. And 30% annual increase in health tourism number of Turkey is expected for the next years by Turkish Health Tourism Coordinator (Türkiye sağlık turizmi çalışmaları, 2011). Although there is a positive atmosphere and expectations about the future of Turkish tourism, research results indicate that tourism entrepreneurs need some supports to get the opportunities in tourism sector. Firstly, they need financial and marketing support. Second, they want the government to reduce tax rates in the sector. Third, they are complaining about the high rate of employee turnover which is one of the most common findings of many researches applied for the sector (Özdemir and Akpınar, 2012; Doğan and Üngüren, 2010). In addition to governmental subventions, new strategies to extend tourism season to create alternative tourism politics such as gold-age tourism, handicapped-tourism, conference-tourism may be a solution for the employee turnover problem of the firms during the recesses, especially for winter seasons. Fourth, they need infrastructure and bureaucratic support. Especially, they complain about the rigid official rules and habits blocking the rapid movements, plans and decisions of entrepreneurs in tourism sector. So, they expect Turkish Tourism Ministry to eliminate heavy bureaucratic transactions. And they believe that ministries, vocational groups, banks, governorships and tourism agents are the other key institutions which will help them to solve the problems. Additionally, research results indicate that there is a financial difficulty in tourism sector and more than 50% of tourism firms are eager to make a partnership with a hope for financial support. Marketing support, managerial experience, technology and competitive (brand) advantage are the other expectations of tourism firms to make a partnership with a foreign investor.

On the other hand, the study has some limitations for practitioners and readers when interpreting the results. At first, the study includes the analyses of only one destination and the results reflect the nature and character of this destination, not a trend for all destinations in Turkey. And the model for the perceptions of top managers for opportunities and strategic partnership desire in tourism sector was developed for this study, thus it requires continued validation and further applications. In other words, the model needs to be tested in further researches. So, additional researches are needed to compare the basic findings of the study.

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